Proposed draft talking points for Minister Matthew for the Labor meeting

September 24th at 9:00AM

Introduction

1. On behalf of the government of Antigua and Barbuda and as a Chair of the Inter-American Committee on Education, I present my compliments to the Ministers and to the Executive Secretariat for Integral Development (SEDI) of the OAS.

2. I am honored for being invited to participate in the XXI Inter-American Conference of Ministers of Labor (IACML) and to this Fourth Plenary Session. I celebrate the intersectoral dialogue and cooperation that we have sustained since the Eight Inter-American Meeting of Ministers of Education in 2015 between Ministries of Education and Labor within the framework of the OAS that has been leading us towards a more resilient Hemisphere. A beacon for the region when it comes to the themes at hand: the world of work with sustainable development, decent work, inclusive and equitable education, productive employment, and social inclusion.

3. The COVID-19 Pandemic has created serious educational, social, economic, and labor challenges in the region, underscoring the urgent need for a more robust intersectoral dialogue, regional cooperation, and consensus-building to address our diverse and complex realities with multidimensional perspectives.

The Interamerican Education Agenda

4. The challenges we are facing continue to evolve, and it request from us a very flexible and timely response under these contexts of constant change. But we are walking this path over solid grounds: The Eighth Inter-American Meeting of Ministers of Education within the framework of CIDI, held in Panama in February 2015, adopted a Resolution¹; entrusting the Inter-American Committee on Education (CIE) with building the Inter-American Education Agenda (IEA): Education with Equity for Prosperity.”, An Hemispheric instrument for policy dialogue that was adopted two years later, in 2017, during our Ministerial Meeting in The Bahamas.

5. By July, 2019, we as Ministers of Education adopted the Plan of Action of Antigua and Barbuda, which seeks to promote the implementation of the Inter-American Education Agenda (IEA). This Plan of Action is based on the principles of collaboration, intersectorality, and interculturalism, and reinforces the link of the Inter American Education Agenda with the objectives and goals set out in the 2030 Agenda, especially in Sustainable Development Goal 4: "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.”

¹ CIDI/RME/RES. 1/15 rev. 1
6. In fact, one of the specific commitments of the Plan of Action of Antigua and Barbuda is to Engage in inter-sectoral collaboration that emphasizes the link between education and labor for producing competitive economies and decent work to improve channels of communication, strengthen collaboration with Ministries of Labor and better articulate efforts to respond to current and emerging educational and labor challenges.

7. During 2019 we had a very productive conversation and call to action from the two sectors as part of the outcomes of the workshop on Skills for the future that took place in Santiago, Chile in May 2019. There, we identified some lessons learned and policy recommendations, as well as concrete actions to strengthen coordination between Ministries of Labor and Education and vocational training institutions, to develop the skills for the future, address the skills gap, and align educational and training offer to the current and future needs of the world of work.

8. Technological change and, in general, the trends of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, have put a great pressure on labor markets and educational systems. These pressures have only increased during the pandemic, as our governments strive to respond to the enormous social, economic, health, education and labor challenges the pandemic has brought upon us.

9. As we discussed in our inter-sectoral workshop in Chile, we need to work towards building an education and training ecosystem for skills development, and we need to have a broad discussion on skills for the future. This should be part of our inter-sectoral collaboration.

10. Skills for the future encompasses digital and technical skills in areas such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). We know these are fields where higher growth and more job creation are expected, but they go beyond that. We have learned that socio-emotional skill sets are also key: critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, leadership and communication skills, and a growth mindset are crucial to succeed in life and work.

11. In our inter-sectoral collaboration, we have recognized the need to work towards better linkages between the education systems and the professional training systems to allow people to transition easily across them. We have also indicated skills certification systems must be strengthened, particularly for those who have achieved their learning through practice, outside a classroom.

12. It is worthy to mention that although technical and technological education respond directly to the demands of the productive sector, they are still undervalued if compared with university education. We need to assign more value to technical and vocational education and training.
13. The importance of teachers training cannot be understated. Accelerated technological change requires the development of new capabilities and continuous training.

14. Our inter-sectoral dialogue so far has also identified qualifications frameworks as a concrete tool to connect the world of education and the world of work. That is why, the OAS, as Technical Secretariat of both the Inter-American Committee on Education and this Labor Conference, has partnered with ILO-CINTERFOR and UNESCO to work towards a Regional Qualification Framework.

15. As a continuation of our work and as you might be familiar with, when we approved the CIE Work Plan for 2019-2022 a specific Project that refers to Develop with ILO-CINTERFOR, OREALC/UNESCO Santiago and UNICEF, a matrix of descriptors and levels of a Qualifications Framework and principles for their usability and comparability was included. Since then, a hemispheric space for dialogue and consensus building was created in coordination between the OAS, ILO, and UNESCO during 2020 and 2021.

16. We hope that the outcome will serve as a reference at the regional level for countries that are starting or implementing qualifications frameworks. This structure will serve as a meta-framework for countries initiating or looking to update their national qualifications frameworks.

**Coordination Education - Health**

17. Given the very rewarding effects and progress made over this intersectoral dialogue among Labor and Education during our 2019 Ministerial Meeting we added to the mix the perspective of Ministries of Health.

18. Ever since, political dialogues have been held between officials from Ministries of Health and Ministries of Education of the OAS Member States jointly organized between the Department of Non-communicable Diseases and Mental Health of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and the Department of Human Development, Education and Employment (DHDEE) as Technical Secretariat of the Inter American Committee on Education (CIE) that I have the honor and privilege to Chair.

19. Therefore, in November 2020, we started a series of Intersectoral Dialogues on “Promoting School Environments, Healthy Eating, and Physical Activity”. The first of the 3 series sessions took place with the purpose of sharing some of the experiences on the promotion, monitoring, and evaluation of school environments conducive to healthy eating and physical activity among representatives from the Ministries of Health and Ministries of Education. This space for public policies and programmatic exchanges offered a starting point to be aware and expand the possibilities of actions that can be configured in the design of future intersectoral policies on improving school environments.
20. As a result of this dialogue about promoting school environments, healthy eating, and physical activity, learning outcomes and recommendations from an intersectoral perspective was given a first step, adding the voices of specialists from Ministries of Education and Health.

21. The second virtual intersectoral dialogue of this Series took place in June 2021, on “Promoting Healthy Life Skills through Physical and Nutrition Education in Schools”. This event offered a fruitful space for the continuity of discussions among Member States where they shared insights and initiatives on how to promote new visions for healthy life skills through physical activity and nutrition education in schools in a post-pandemic world, and to contribute to the policies, research, capacities, practices, and the infrastructure necessary to make those visions a reality.

22. Certainly, our Hemisphere has been facing significant challenges increased under the context of the pandemic. Member States have expressed that the COVID-19 pandemic has even put a hold on programs and activities as some funds have been diverted for COVID-19 efforts. The need of finding ways to keep the Ministries engaged, while at the same time keeping up with the changes set forth by shifts in administrations. The relevance of intersectorality has been a highlighted reference and request not only between education and health, but labor, agriculture, social security, environment, housing, and others.

23. In this sense, in the next few days the third of the 3 series policy dialogue on this intersectoral dialogue will be held. This time, the focus is on building upon the experiences, lessons and outcomes on “Promotion of regulations and standards for the availability, sale, and marketing of foods in the school environment”. This topic was raised as one of the proposed joint activities, especially in the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and further plans for the reopening of the schools in the Region. Once again, it is highlighted that effective implementation of regulations will require engagement across multiple sectors.

Closing remarks

24. Colleagues, I wish to reiterate our commitment and keeping this coherent approach among our sectors but also, I wish to make a call for cohesive action among our sectors. Next steps must aim to expand this collaborative work done so far, integrating other sectors, including the Ministries of Education, Health, Labor, Development and Social Inclusion, Agriculture, Production, Culture, Housing and Sanitation, Women and Vulnerable Populations, it is this way that we will be able to optimize the countries’ capacity to generate opportunities for the development of their citizenship rights.